Oswald Probe Figure Found Dead in Bed; DA Planned Arrest

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NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 22. — David W. Ferrie, a pilot who figured in District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, was found dead in his bed Wednesday. Garrison said he had planned to arrest Ferrie next week.

Ferrie, once interrogated as an alleged "getaway pilot" for a Presidential assassin, was discovered at 11 A. M. with a sheet pulled up to his chest. New Orleans authorities are in disagreement over the cause of death.

CALLS IT SUICIDE

Orleans parish coroner Dr. Nicholas J. Chetta said Ferrie died of a ruptured blood vessel at the base of the brain. Garrison called it an apparent suicide.

This reporter may have been the last person to see him alive, during a four-hour conversation that ended shortly before 4 A. M. Wednesday.

"A President," he told me at one point in the rambling interview, "is not better than anyone else. If I were killed, I'd expect my death to be investigated just as thoroughly."

It was almost as if he went back upstairs after I left to prove the point.

NEW ORLEANS PLOT

Garrison declared that his investigators had intended to arrest Ferrie next week in the District Attorney's highly publicized investigation of the death of President Kennedy. Garrison has asserted that Mr. Kennedy's death in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, was the product of a plot hatched in New Orleans.

Garrison called Ferrie "one of history's most important individuals."

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy," the District Attorney said. He said that he decided only Wednesday morning to hold off Ferrie's arrest another week.

WAITED TOO LONG

"Apparently we waited too long," Garrison said. He refused to spell out the charges that might have been lodged against the pilot.

Ferrie told me he felt convinced there was no plot to kill the President, that Lee Harvey Oswald was a "loner."

A loner himself, Ferrie seemed in good spirits, not like a man about to kill himself.

"Kennedy is dead," he said. "Let's get on with living."

But he also described himself as moody, even, at one point as I recall it, given to manic-depressive moods.

A brown bottle of medicine, tablets apparently, was standing on the worn-down piano in his living room when I left. Garrison said 14 other bottles were found scattered around the house. Ferrie was reportedly suffering from emphysema.

It was Ferrie who forced Garrison to acknowledge Saturday that he was conducting a full-scale investigation of what Garrison called a conspiracy resulting in the Kennedy assassination.

Ferrie told me he was convinced it would turn out to be a "witch hunt."

Ferrie was a ruddy-faced man in his late 40s.

FIRED AS PILOT

An explosion several years ago cost him his hair and eyebrows. He wore a shaggy toupee and mascara eyebrows.

Police records showed he was fired as an airline pilot after being arrested in Jefferson parish (county), which adjoins New Orleans, on a morals charge. The case never went to trial.

Garrison said his investigation has unearthed evidence not available to the Warren Commission. He would not elaborate.

Ferrie, a native of Cleveland, O., has lived in New Orleans the last 15 years.

He had been summoned by Garrison's men last November on broadly the same grounds for which he had been picked up within 72 hours after Mr. Kennedy's assassination.

HELD AS FUGITIVE

At that time he had been arrested as a "fugitive from Texas" and questioned about reports that he might have been

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AP Wirephoto

David W. Ferrie, a key figure in New Orleans probe of President Kennedy's assassination, has been found dead in New Orleans. Ferrie's eyebrows were burned in an explosion years ago and he used mascara to cover the scars.

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Dallas that sunny afternoon, aiting at Love Field with a ane to fly Oswald to safety. Ferrie said he was sitting on courthouse bench outside a ederal district courtroom in ew Orleans, "shooting the bull ith a couple of Federal gents," until a case he had een working on was completed t 3:20 P. M. that day.

"There wasn't even any harge against me in Texas to ee from," he said.

DIDN'T GO TO DALLAS

Ferrie said he did leave for Texas with several acquaintances after leaving the courthouse—to Galveston and Houston "hunting geese"—but that he never set foot in Dallas.

Ferrie said he never knew Oswald and had no recollection of ever having met him. Oswald was rumored to have served in Ferrie's Civil Air Patrol unit in New Orleans, but Ferrie said they were in different units.

Ferrie was also rumored to have flown Oswald to Cuba around 1959. He scoffed at the report.

"I've never even been to Cuba," he said. "At the time I was supposed to be flying Oswald to Cuba, I understand he was in the Marine Corps."

DATA ON ASSASSINATION

Ferrie said he considered "this preoccupation" with the

Kennedy assassination "ghoulish." But his rooms showed that it occupied him day and night.

Copies of magazine articles on the President's death, books attacking the Warren Commission, even his own mathematical calculations of the path of the assassin's bullets, cluttered the floor.

On Tuesday, he said, he had been at the public library reading the Warren report.

He had also been conducting his own investigation to counter Garrison's.

On Monday, he turned up at a restaurant near Canal street to talk to Carlos Bringuier, a Cuban exile who had scuffled with Oswald three years ago on a New Orleans street corner over Oswald's distribution of leaflets of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

Bringuier, who insists that the assassination was a pro-Castro conspiracy, recalled Ferrie's visit with distaste.

"He asked me if I could help him," Bringuier said. "He told me that anyone who thinks there could be a Communist plot behind the Kennedy assassination should go to a psychiatrist. That's the first time anybody ever sent me to a psychiatrist."

TELLS OF QUESTIONS

Pulling out a paper napkin as he was sitting in his restaurant, the Casa Cuba, Bringuier read off the questions Ferrie had asked of him:

—Any Americans or any Cubans that Oswald had any association with in New Orleans.

—If there is a conspiracy, when it started, the dates."

Bringuier, who went on the speaking circuit after the asassination with the right-wing organization Christian Crusade, shrugged.

"There was a plot," he insisted, adding that he disagreed with Garrison's declaration earlier in the week that a foreign power was not involved.

JUST CURIOUS

In his apartment shortly before he died, Ferrie explained his own investigation by saying, "I'm just curious." He said he did not trust the courts or Garrison's investigation.

In the interview, Ferrie gave his assent to the quotation of only a few of his remarks, on the grounds that it might cause him problems. His death seems to remove the restriction.

Ferrie said he was especially worried that what he was saying might trigger a "premature arrest by Garrison's men." The District Attorney "knows he's got a tiger by the tail," Ferrie said, referring to himself.

Ferrie said he was fluent in several languages and trained in psychology and medicine. He showed the assimilation of many of the 3000 books he had scattered through his rooms.

At the press conference after Ferrie's death, Garrison expressed his regret and suggested that the press may have driven Ferrie to take his own life.

Garrison said that his men had been keeping "a continuous stakeout" around Ferrie's apartment at 3330 Louisianna parkway "for a long period."

TURNS OUT LIGHTS

In response to questions, Garrison told reporters that the stakeout was not a round-the-clock surveillance, however. He said his men waited until "approximately 11 last night when he turned out all the lights."

"We saw signs of extreme nervousness, endless pacing of the floor, comments to individuals in the last week or two relative to killing himself," Garrison said.

Ferrie's body was found by a man police refused to identify. Garrison said the individual had to break into the house to make the discovery.

The District Attorney also vowed full speed ahead with his investigation of the Kennedy assassination. He said he had no intention of calling in the FBI.

Garrison professed unhappiness with what he said was the "secret" classification stamped on pages in the Warren Commission volumes referring to Ferrie.

He said the FBI had stamped them secret and implied that J. Edgar Hoover's men had been less than cooperative in other areas of the investigation as well.

Ferrie had a different story.

LOST STATEMENT

He said that when he was summoned for questioning last fall, Garrison's men wanted him to track over the ground he had covered with them in 1963, on the ground that the District Attorney's Office had lost its copy of his initial statement.

(At the press conference, Garrison complained specifically that the FBI never gave his office a copy of Ferrie's 1963 statement.)

Ferrie said that when they told him what they wanted he responded that he would get a fresh copy of the statement for them from the FBI himself.

JACK MARTIN'S STUFF

"They said, 'no, don't do that,'" Ferrie said. "I said I would. They said, 'Don't say we sent you.'"

Ferrie said that when he went to the FBI they immediately downgraded the request with the observation, "'Oh, that's Jack Martin's stuff.'"

Martin, a courthouse hanger-on and apparently a self-appointed private investigator in New Orleans, was the man Ferrie blamed for getting the initial report which resulted in his being picked up in 1963. Ferrie also blamed Martin, whose whereabouts are unknown, for triggering the Garrison investigation.

Ferrie, who had in the past been arrested on morals charges involving young boys, said he did have until recently his own doubts that Oswald was the only assassin. He referred to the "myriad of paperbacks" that came out last fall, around the time that Garrison began his investigation.

AUTOPSY REPORT

Ferrie said he was especially disturbed by the controversy over the autopsy report, suggesting that there must have been more than one rifle aimed at President Kennedy on the parade route.

In an odd sideline development, authorities in Pensacola, Fla., were asked Wednesday to exhume the body of Thomas H. Killam—who was married to a stripper in Jack Ruby's nightclub, and who also worked as a house painter with a man who once lived in the same boarding house with Oswald.

Earl Killam, the dead man's brother, said he wanted a special examination made to determine the exact cause of death.

PROBABLE SUICIDE

Thomas Killam was found dead amid shattered window glass on a downtown Pensacola street March 17, 1964. Police listed it as probable suicide, the Pensacola News-Journal said.

Earl Killam said his brother told him that "agents" and "plotters" visited him repeatedly after the assassination when he was living in Dallas while his wife worked at Ruby's nightclub.

Ruby, who died of cancer recently, killed Oswald in a shooting before television cameras in Dallas.